Hello! My name is Chris Soria, and this is my first time presenting at PAA, or any academic conference for that matter, so any feedback or ideas on how to improve my research are much appreciated.

This presentation, Father Connection and Support in Adulthood, is based on a working paper – and I have nothing to disclose.

**Introduction**

**Literature Review: Fatherhood Research**

First, a bit of background on the current state of fatherhood research.

We know that children tend to do better when they have a father in their lives, but this research can be limited in that it typically only measures the mere presence or absence of a father and doesn’t further measure the *quality* of a father’s presence.

And although the general consensus is that fathers are crucial to the socialization of their children, it’s not clear as to why or how that is the case. For example, is it the mere presence of a father, or is it the quality of their relationship with the child?

Further, much of the existing fatherhood research examines his impact on his children at a young age. There’s less research on his impact throughout the life course.

[[You need something here on why father relationship is important for adult network characteristics]]. Research on the role of fatherhood on adult children’s outcomes may be especially important for considering how his presence is related to the child’s adult personal relationships.

**Hypotheses: Are Fathers Essential?**

There are two competing theories within Fatherhood research at the moment. The first is the essential father hypothesis, which argues that fathers produce a unique impact on their children relative to the mother.

The second is the important father hypothesis, which argues that the father’s impact on his children is important, but that his impact is *not* unique.

What I’m interested in is how the *positive* presence of a father in childhood is associated with unique adult personal network characteristics.

**Theory: Attachment Theory**

There are two theoretical frameworks that I have drawn from in shaping my hypothesis.

The first is attachment theory, which posits that when individuals feel they have an attachment figure which acts as a “secure base,” they are more likely to go out and explore their world and meet new people.

However, more research is needed on the role of parental attachment and how it can impact the lives of *adults*.

**Theory: Social Capital**

The other theory that has informed my research is Social Capital theory.

There are two ways that *I’m* focusing on in which social capital can be passed down by a father. The first is parent community capital, which is basically the father introducing his children to his connections.

The second is through parental socialization, which is basically the father teaching their children social skills which are conducive towards generating a stronger social network.

Because social networks tend to be homophilous in regards to gender, in both scenarios, the consequence *could* be his children have a more robust social network which looks more like him.

**Methods**

**UCNETS**

To test my hypotheses, I drew from the UC Berkeley Social Networks Study, also known as UCNets, which allowed me to measure the size and composition of an individual’s social network as well as the quality of their father’s presence.

“UCNets” is a five-year panel study funded by the National Institute on Aging and is unique it’s ability to look in-depth at personal networks across two age cohorts – 21-30 year olds, and 50-70 year olds, all of whom were living in the San Francisco Bay Area at baseline.

Responses were collected in 2015 through address and Facebook-based sampling in the first wave of a longitudinal panel survey.

The UCNets study consists more predominantly of women. To correct for this, I applied weights that would amplify the responses of men so as to make their representation more equal to the SF Bay Area demographic.

**Social Network**

In order to get detailed information on the respondent’s personal network, respondents were asked a series of name-generating questions in response to things like “who do you confide in”, “who might you be abe to call upon in an emergency”, etc. Additionally, to assess levels of social involvement, respondents were asked how often they engaged in certain activities – like dining out with friends, or participation in informal or formal group.

For my paper, I decided to focus on responses to the people named as a social companion, a confidant, or someone to ask advice from. However, for this presentation, I will present *mainly* on social companions.

**Father Conceptualization**

After respondents listed various alters to the name-generating questions, they were *then* asked to describe their relationship to those alters. If they were a father, they would be labeled as “parent” and male.” Respondents were also asked which of the people they named were people they felt “especially close to.”

Respondents were also asked to identify whether their father was still alive. The study informed respondents that “Father could be biological, adopted, or step.”

Therefore, in my study, a “*father*” is not necessarily a *biological* father, it is whomever the *respondent* considers to be their father. People who stated that their father was deceased were not included in this sample.

**Independent Variables**

Father variables were constructed around three categories of respondents. First, there were people who named a father in their social network and also considered him to be “especially close.” Second, there were people who named their father but did not consider him “close.” Lastly, there were respondents who did not name a father, but reported that he was alive. This last category represents respondents with an “estranged” father.

Parallel “close” mother variables were also created to be used as controls.

**Dependent Variables**

To assess informal social engagement, respondents were asked, “How often do you go out to concerts, plays, clubs, sports, or other events with friends or relatives?”

I used the total number of people the respondent named as a social companion as a dependent variable. I then broke these out into male and female only totals and used each as dependent variables.

**Dependent Variables cont.**

I removed parents from these three lists if they were named in them.

These are, then, measures of the respondent’s Social Companions *beyond* the parents.

As you can see, the outcome is three distinct lists: *all* Social Companions beyond all parents, male only ties beyond fathers, and female only Social Companions beyond mothers).

**Model and Variable Structure**

I used an SPSS General Linear Model (also known as UNIANOVA with Fixed Factors and Covariates) due to its ability to incorporate categorical and continuous variables into one output. This model is, however, mathematically similar to a linear regression.

Essentially, this model takes the highest numbered category of my “Close Father” variable and treats “father not close” as the reference category to compare to each category below it independently, as can be seen in the graphic below. It fits all covariates onto a regression line.

I controlled for respondent race, gender, education, income, age, and whether respondents completed the survey in-person or online.

Maybe it’s not *subjective* closeness that’s important for measuring the father’s impact on their adult children’s social network, but rather physical closeness. For this reason, I controlled for the father’s physical distance from the respondent.

I also controlled for major life events that have been shown to affect an individual’s network and social support, and which may also affect the individual’s relationship with their parents. These are a new baby, a new job, and marital status.

**Results**

**General Models: Social Companions**

And, finally, here are the results.

First, we’ll look at total social companions.

Looking at the effect of father relationship quality on the total number of social companions, we see that individuals who named a Close Father have a significantly higher numbers of social companions compared to those who name a Father who is Not Close.

Additionally, there was no difference in the number of social companions named among respondents who either named a Father as Not Close or did not name a Father.

**General Models: Social Companions cont. (2)**

It’s much easier however to interpret estimated marginal means, which are means adjusted for by the other variables in the model. In general, people who report having a close father have close to .6 more Social Companions on average.

The differences in slopes between male and female respondents was not discernable on this plot, which implies that the association holds for both males and females about the same.

**Male Social Companions**

Similar to the results among all companions, a Close Father was significantly associated with more **male** social companions compared to people who named a father but not consider him especially close. [you can’t compare effects across models]

And again, there was no statistical difference in the number of male social companions among those who name a father who was not close, and those who did not name a father.

The Close Mother variable, again, did not produce any significant results here.

**Male Social Companions cont. (2)**

In an estimated marginal means plots, it can be more clearly seen that people who report having an “especially close” also report having more *male* Social Companions. Again, the slopes look about the same when looking at male and female respondent specific plots.

**Female Social Companions**

**Female Social Companions cont. (1)**

The storyline takes a turn when I use female-only Social Companions as a dependent variable.

As you can see here, neither the “Close Father” or “Close Mother” variable produce any significant variation between categories when using female Social Companions as an outcome. The same is true for categories within the close mother variable.

**Female Social Companions cont. (2)**

Finally, in estimated marginal means plots, it’s more clearly visible that no category in the “Close Father” variable differs significantly from the others.

In other words, a subjectively close father is strongly associated with more male Social Companions, but not female Social Companions.

**Results cont.**

A very similar result came about when I used confidants as dependent variables. Having a subjectively close father was associated with more male-confidants, but not more female confidants. However, a close father had no impact on advice-giving ties of any sort.

And, I will briefly mention the mother in these results with the disclaimer that these models are designed to revolve around the father.

The close mother variable mirrored the results of the close father variable when using confidants as a dependent variable. In other words, a close mother was associated with more female confidants, but not more male. A subjectively close mother was actually associated with ***fewer*** male confidants.

That’s something that I’ll have to look more closely into in future research and in models that are designed to revolve around the mother.

**Conclusions**

**Summary**

In summary, people who have a father they feel especially close to are more likely to have more male Social Companions, but not female ones. It is important to note that the absence of a father (father alive, but not named) was not associated with any difference in the social network compared to those who named a father that was not close. These results suggest that the mere presence of a father is not associated with any change in the network composition. Additionally, an emotionally close father produced significant outcomes even beyond what could be accounted for by the father’s physical distance from his children.

And, because I controlled for the mother’s presence and closeness in the same models, I can say that close fathers produce unique results in relation to mothers. Close fathers are associated with more male ties, close mothers are not. This is in support of the “essential father” hypothesis.

A pattern emerged in which close fathers were associated with more males in respondent social networks, and close mothers were associated with more females.

**Discussion**

First of all, I want to say that I consider this a good first step in the direction of this research. And, because this is a cross-sectional study, more research will be needed for determining the direction of these associations. For this reason, I hope to utilize all three waves of the UCNets study in my next iteration.

Also, although I’ve identified that a close father is associated with a more robust social network, I haven’t been able to pin down exactly what it is about a close father that may produce this result.

For now, I think these results make the most sense when interpreted through the social capital perspective.

Maybe fathers are more likely to introduce their children to people they end up socializing with. People with larger, more diverse networks, often benefit from better health, more job opportunities, and greater resources.

The father’s network is likely homophilous, and more likely to be male, and so it would make sense that most of the people he introduces his adult children to are also male—A sort of “father-specific parent community capital.”

Also, it’s possible that adult children who feel “especially close” to their fathers are more likely to mimic their father’s behavior and/or learn how to engage with people who are similar to him. And so, it’s possible that a close father passes down *social skills* that are more compatible with generating more males to socialize with. This could be labeled as “father-specific parental socialization.”

As I said further research will be needed in order to test this theory.

**Final**

Thank you for listening, and thank you to everyone who has helped me put this research together.